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with best wishes of  
Henry Bronson.

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# BIOGRAPHICAL NOTICE

OF

## PROF. ELI IVES, M.D.

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BY HENRY BRONSON, M.D.

*Presented by  
Henry March*

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[RE-PUBLISHED FROM THE PROCEEDINGS OF THE CONNECTICUT  
MEDICAL SOCIETY.]

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1867.

PROF. ELLIOTT M.D.

OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

NEW YORK

1907

## BIOGRAPHICAL NOTICE.

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It is a beautiful custom, which this Society has adopted, of publishing with its proceedings appropriate biographical sketches of its deceased members. In no other way can we so well preserve the memory of our departed friends, and hand down to future generations the knowledge of what they were and what they did. There is an eminent fitness in our thus honoring those among us whose rare endowments and distinguished success, as physicians, have placed them in the front rank of the profession.

In an old house, still standing on the northeasterly side of Broadway, next east of the brick house owned and occupied by the late Geo. F. H. Read, in New Haven, February 7th, 1778,\* ELI IVES was born. His father, a highly respectable physician of large practice, bore the name of Levi—his mother that of Lydia Augur. Eli was their third son, and fourth child. In 1795 he entered Yale College, and graduated in 1799. For a period of fifteen months,† he was Rector of the Hopkins Grammar School in New Haven. While still teaching, he pursued the study of Medicine with his father, and with Dr. Eneas Monson, Sen., the last a celebrated physician and wit, whose attainments in the science of that day, particularly in Mineralogy, Chemistry and Botany, were important, and whose knowledge of indigenous *Materia Medica* was, perhaps, unsurpassed. That his education might be more complete, he visited Philadelphia, and attended lectures in the most eminent medical school in America, where Rush, Wistar and

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\*This date is taken from the family record, kept by the father. Dr. Dutton's Funeral Address and the American Annual Cyclopedia, give a later date, viz. February 7th, 1779. According to the North Church record, he was baptized February 21st, 1779.

† Dr. Dutton and the Cyclopedia above named say that he was Rector for the two years after his graduation; but according to the record of the Grammar School he was appointed to the office April 9th, 1799, (I think this is the correct reading,) while his successor, Mr. Bartlett, was chosen July 1st, 1800, (not 1801, as in Rev. L. W. Bacon's "Historical Discourse," &c.)



Barton taught with distinguished success. At a subsequent period, (about 1805,) he left his practice, and again became a pupil in the Philadelphia school.

As evidence of his literary acquirements, it is mentioned by Dr. Dutton, in his Funeral Address, that he was offered the place of Tutor in Yale College. Another proof of scholarship may be found in the fact that he delivered, by appointment, the Phi Beta Kappa Oration in 1802.

On his first return from Philadelphia, probably early in 1802, Dr. Ives made known to his father his intention of commencing practice in some country town. The latter thought that he (the son) had better go into business with him, or at least remain three months as an experiment. The suggestion of the parent was adopted. I conclude, for several reasons, that Dr. Ives commenced practice at the period indicated, notwithstanding Dr. Dutton gives 1801 as the time. In the record book of the New Haven County Meetings of the Connecticut Medical Society, under date of May 4th, 1802, I find the following entry :—" Dr. Eli Ives, having been examined and approved by the Examining Committee, [of the Connecticut Medical Society, for license,] was admitted a member of the Society."

On leaving his father, " young Dr. Ives," as he was then called, opened an office in a house which then stood on the south side of Chapel street, opposite the South College, New Haven. After his marriage to Miss Maria Beers, daughter of Dea. Nathan Beers, September 17th, 1805, he removed to a building which stood on the same side of the street, just above High street. At a later period, he lived in a brick house, (now four, then three stories high,) which stands just east of the building first occupied, and which now adjoins the home lot of Mr. Gaius F. Warner. While residing here, more than fifty years ago, he bought a large lot on the east side of Temple street, north of Wall, (then a new part of the city,) and about 1814 built a house on the corner, (southwest corner of the square,) where he afterwards lived and died.

Devoting himself to his profession with singleness of purpose and tireless energy, he soon obtained a very large and lucrative practice. While still living in Chapel street, his business in town and country was so pressing that he found it convenient to keep three horses, and, in seasons of unusual sickness, hardly had time for the necessary sleep and meals. Though of a slender constitution, and always delicate in health, he bore up under his accumulated labors in a way that astonished his friends.



In 1806, Dr. Ives was elected one of the Fellows of the Connecticut Medical Society, and was re-elected for the eight succeeding years. He was also the Secretary in 1810, 1811 and 1812, and a member of the Examining Committee for New Haven County, from 1805 to 1812, inclusive. In the first number of "Communications," published in 1810 by vote of the Convention, will be found three short papers (cases) from his pen, one, a "Case of Retroverted Uterus," being anonymous. In October, 1811, the honorary degree of M. D. was conferred on him by the Society, in accordance with its charter.

In the proceedings of the Convention, (its action being prompted by a letter received from a Committee of Yale College,) which began in 1807 and terminated in 1810 in the adoption by the parties in interest of "Articles of Union," and resulted in establishing the Medical Institution of Yale College, Dr. Ives bore an influential part. He was on all the committees of conference, and seems, indeed, to have been at the head of the movement, so far as the Medical Society was concerned.

These facts, not in themselves very important, point unmistakably to the high position which Dr. Ives, then just entering upon professional life, occupied among his brethren. When, in addition to these indications of confidence and respect, he came to be chosen, by the joint action of the Connecticut Medical Society and the Corporation of Yale College, to fill a most responsible place in the new-born Medical Institution, we have the best evidence of his excellent reputation and rare endowments. It was then a great thing to be a professor. There were but four medical colleges in the country; these were in Philadelphia, New York, Boston, and Hanover (New Hampshire); and the man who (on the ground of merit) was selected to give a course of public lectures, was considered high up on the professional ladder, if not on its topmost round. Though Dr. Eneas Monson, sen., was made an associate professor in the chair of *Materia Medica*, on account, probably, of the eclat which his well known name would give to the College, little aid could have been expected from one then almost eighty years old.

The school was opened in November, 1813, with an attendance of thirty-three pupils.\* "Commons" were established in the basement of the college building, while the spare rooms above were occupied by the students. The class was assembled morning and evening for prayers, the professors officiating, and the rigid rules governing the

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\* Dr. Knight's Introductory Lecture, 1853.

academical department were enforced. For the benefit of his classes, public and private, and for the advancement of science, Dr. Ives, at his own expense, undertook to convert the ample grounds adjoining the College on the east into a botanical garden, built a hot house, and introduced a variety of native and foreign plants, shrubs and trees, mostly of a medicinal character; but the time and expense required proved too burdensome, and the "garden," after a somewhat protracted "struggle for life," perished from neglect.

I attended lectures in New Haven in 1824-5, and again in 1826-7. Dr. Nathan Smith, then a little over sixty years of age, (he seemed very old,) was Professor of Surgery and "Theory and Practice." He was in some respects an extraordinary man, self-made, as the phrase is, (all men who are well made are self-made,) original in his views and methods, inexhaustible in resources, sound in judgment, and overflowing with strong common sense. His most remarkable feature was a nose, turned to one side, of uncommon longitudinal proportions, which, during lectures, he plied almost incessantly with great pinches of snuff, much of which lodged in the folds of his waistcoat. His neck was short, his head bowed, his voice smothered in his throat, his surgical demonstrations slovenly, the matter of his discourse often disjointed, but he gave excellent practical instruction. His words were treasured up, and are not yet forgotten by those who heard them. He was respected the more for the admirable little treatise on "Typhus Fever," which he had, at that time, just published.

Dr. Knight, then in his early prime, lectured on Anatomy, Physiology and Midwifery. I see him now as he appeared more than forty years ago—a square, compactly built, well-dressed man in a blue suit with gilt brass buttons and white cravat. He holds in his hand an anatomical preparation, or rests the tips of his fingers on the dissecting table. His posture may be a little stiff, his expression slightly severe, but the massive head, the dark, deep-set, piercing eyes and beetling brows, the dignified bearing, and downright emphatic manner, make a profound impression. His voice is good, his enunciation distinct. He is clear, concise, methodical and exact; begins at the beginning, goes straight to the end, and stops when he has finished—a rare merit. He is not fluent, but the desired words are forthcoming in good time, every one of which is significant. There is nothing redundant, nothing deficient. His expressions are selected with skill, but his taste is not finical. Though appearing to look intently on the specimen in hand, he sees everything. Is a disturb-



ance made on the back seat? The transgressor is instantly silenced by an electric shot from beneath those frowning brows.

Dr. Knight was not an orator, not an eloquent man; had little enthusiasm and no imagination; declined all attempts at wit; made only the simplest gestures, and these mostly with the head; used no ornament or clap-trap; and yet he contrived by simple, truthful description, and earnest, matchless statement, to rivet the attention of all, even when his subject was the dryest. But he is gone, and we shall not soon see his like.

Dr. Ives, then nearly fifty, (I was at one time his private pupil,) lectured on *Materia Medica*, Botany and the Diseases of Children. He was tall and spare, of a weak organization, with a pleasant countenance and mild blue eye, unceremonious and unpretending, familiar and agreeable in manners, and plain in dress. He had a high, somewhat retreating forehead, which was heavily developed above and around the eyes, in the region of Gall's perceptive faculties. His appearance as he sat in his blue cloak with scarlet facing, reading his lecture from loose papers a little dingy with age, his voice rusty and feeble, his elocution hesitating and difficult, was not prepossessing. The sentences seemed sometimes broken, and the thought not always continuous. In many important particulars, he was the reverse of Dr. Knight. In theory, he adopted Murray's classification of remedies, but did not allow it to interfere with his freedom of movement. In truth, he had little system or method, especially in the subdivisions of his subject; but allowed his thoughts to travel up and down as humor or the occasion suggested. He would begin anywhere, and ramble all over the field, gathering whatever was most valuable that came in his way. Frequently in these wanderings, he invaded the neighboring province of Theory and Practice—often, indeed, seemed about to take up his abode there; but he always came back, well laden with interesting items, and nobody complained. At short intervals, unmindful of his notes, he would lean forward, rest his arms on the desk, and after a few preparatory hems, state a case, or relate an anecdote, in way of illustration or recreation, alluding, perhaps, to what Dr. Monson Sen., Dr. Gilbert, or Dr. Potter (of Wallingford) had said or done. His pleasantries were heralded by a certain twinkling of the eyes, and several extra hems which the mirth-loving of the class were quick to interpret. He was not a good story-teller, but his stories were piquant and amusing, and all enjoyed them, including the narrator. That the Doctor could appreciate wit and point, and had a keen relish for the humorous, was apparent enough.



Notwithstanding his short-comings, Dr. Ives had many valuable qualities as an instructor, and gave an excellent practical course. Had he been as eloquent, he would have been a greater man than Dr. Rush. Fettered by no theory, indulging in no speculation, but depending mainly on his own abundant resources, he communicated to the class, in his peculiar and familiar way, the results of the closest observation, and the richest experience—gave them the knowledge most needed at the bedside of sickness. He had treasured up in his capacious memory an immense store of facts gathered during many years of discriminating practice and thoughtful study, which he poured forth in unstinted measure. Every one who heard him, whether novice or veteran physician, was impressed with the great value of his teachings.

Dr. Ives knew more of our indigenous *Materia Medica*, doubtless, than any man who lived as early. He began the study when still a pupil, and pursued it uninterruptedly till late in life, and till the surrounding country had been thoroughly explored. He was indebted to Dr. Munson, as he frankly acknowledged, but he owed far more to his own inextinguishable love of knowledge—his own adventurous and untiring industry. Though eager to gather information from any quarter, he did not trust to common fame—to nurses and root-doctors—but tried every thing in the crucible of experience. The native medicinal plants which were treated of by him, some at length and others briefly, are very numerous and belong to all the classes of remedial agents—Narcotics, Anti-spasmodics, Tonics, Astringents, Deobstruents, Emetics, Cathartics, Diuretics, Diaphoretics, Expectorants, Emmenagogues, &c.

Not only did Dr. Ives describe well many important articles before almost or wholly unknown, but he recognized certain medicinal properties or powers till his time overlooked, or but partially acknowledged. Guided by his quick perceptions and clear insight, he found that a peculiar, imperfectly described effect on the viscera of the abdomen, the glandular organs and the secretions, was produced by the continued use of such medicines as Conium, Sanguinaria, Dandelion, small doses of Mercury, &c., which he called the deobstruent effect, naming the agents themselves *Deobstruents*—an old, but till then, almost forgotten term. Dr. Tully afterwards called them Adenagics. The recognition and description (not complete but sufficient) of this prominent therapeutical effect—this fundamental power—show that Dr. Ives was an acute and original observer, almost a discoverer; and had he done nothing else, his labors would entitle him to a very high rank in

our profession. But he made other discriminations of great importance. He distinguished more clearly than had been done before, the irritant or acrid-stimulant operation of Cantharis, Capsicum, Zanthoxylon, Pyrethrum—those remedies which increase susceptibility and remove torpor merely—from the arterial-stimulant action of Alcohol, Wine and Cinchona, which sustain the movements of the heart and arteries. The former group he termed *Acrids*. Cantharis, the type (say) of the class, or sub-class, was with him a favorite article, particularly in low fevers with typhoid symptoms. “It transfers,”—to use his oft-repeated but very exceptionable expression—“it transfers excitement from the nerves to the blood vessels.”

Dr. Ives was accustomed to lecture to the class, in a very brief and elementary way, on Botany. (Once he gave a popular course to the people of New Haven.) The science was to him a delightful one, and he pursued it with great zeal and success, and amid the inexorable duties of his profession, for his whole life. He collected all the plants growing in New Haven and its vicinity, analyzed and classified them according to the artificial or sexual system of Linnæus, to a large extent preserved them by pressing, and could tell where every specimen grew. The natural system of Jussieu, which arranges plants according to their natural affinities, and which has now superseded the Linnæan method, was then scarcely known in this country. And that the Doctor's merits may be appreciated, it should be remembered that scientific Botany, when he began the study, was in its infancy among us, and he a “bold pioneer.” The difficulty he encountered for the want of proper descriptions was very great. He obtained, with much delay and large expense, a few books from England and the Continent, and sought information by correspondence with the savans of Europe. His love of knowledge and unyielding courage alone sustained him in the arduous work. The importance of his labors was generally appreciated, and several diplomas were conferred on him by British and European societies.

In Dr. Dwight's “Statistical Account of the City of New Haven,” published in 1811, may be seen a list of “Vegetable Productions found in New Haven,” containing the names of about 320 species, which was prepared by Dr. Ives. A much more extended catalogue, with the names of 1156 species, “the joint production of Doctors Eli Ives, William Tully, and Melines C. Leavenworth,” was printed in Baldwin's “Annals of Yale College,” editions of 1831 (?) and 1838. Dr. Tully dedicated to Dr. Ives his Medical Prize Essay on *Sanginaria Canadensis*, (published in 1828, in the *American Medical Recorder*.)

and improved the opportunity to compliment his old preceptor in the highest terms, as a cultivator of Botany and indigenous *Materia Medica*. A better authority in the matter referred to could not be named.

But it was as a practitioner that Dr. Ives appeared to best advantage. In the sick room he was at home—"master of the situation." The strain upon the intellect held his discursive faculty in check. He was shrewd, sagacious and able; self-possessed; if need be, adventurous and aggressive in practice, but still discreet; discriminating, quick to perceive, and sound in judgment; firm in his well-matured opinions, and prompt in action. So extensive was his experience, and so rapid his analysis of symptoms, that his knowledge seemed at times almost intuitive. The familiar forms of disease were comprehended so quickly, (by a glance, as it were,) that young physicians not understanding the process, were prone to think him hasty and superficial. However it may have been late in life, when protracted ill health had broken his constitution, in his early days, especially in critical or obscure cases, his investigations were searching and complete. Like a skillful general, he rarely failed "to penetrate the designs of the enemy" he would dislodge—rarely failed to make out a clear and correct diagnosis and prognosis. His extensive knowledge of remedies, and of the modifications produced by surrounding influences, and by peculiar methods of management, made him a successful prescriber. In the diseases of children, his reputation and skill were unrivalled. He was not a routinist; was not the slave of authority or fashion; was not tied up by formulas, or governed by the name of the disease; but cases were treated on rational principles, each according to symptoms and special indications. Nor did he neglect any of those circumstances in a malady which so often determine its character, progress and termination, such as age, sex, habits, period, season, mental and bodily conformation, passing emotions, &c. He believed in epidemic constitutions, and frequent changes of diathesis, which introduced new forms—styles, so to say—of disease, and required new remedial agencies.

It would be difficult to name a physician who equalled Dr. Ives in the skillful adaptation of means to ends—in the dexterous *timing* of remedies and treatment. He was, in truth, a man of infinite tact, ingenious and adroit; understood the whole art of management in the sick room; perceived how necessary it was to secure the confidence of the patient and his friends, and knew the way to obtain it. No great or good physician ever lived, who had not the power, in some



way, to inspire confidence. The candidate for practice who has not this indispensable power,—*gift* it may be called,—is doomed to failure—and starvation.

Though Dr. Ives prescribed Brandy, Opium, Aconite, Digitalis, Prussic acid, Nux-Vomica, Cinchona, Cantharis, &c., sometimes freely, he was yet more attached to mild remedies—the Vegetable Bitters and Astringents, Aromatics, Anti-spasmodics, Diaphoretics, Absorbents, &c. From the frequency with which he employed native plants of weak power, some accused him of inefficiency; but the charge was groundless. He did not feel justified in giving more or stronger medicine than the case required—could not see the wisdom of touching off a cannon to kill a fly. The prudence and reserve which appeared in his practice were no more characteristic than commendable.

Some suppose that a man can be a good physician without much study or the use of books. Dr. Ives, though intensely practical in every thing, did not think so. He was a diligent and effective student through life. His reading was chiefly professional and scientific, though it sometimes took a wider range. With the science of Agriculture he was familiar, but did not, I believe, make farming profitable. He was a much valued member of the Horticultural and Pomological Societies of New Haven, and was the President of each. In the raising of fruits, and particularly of pears, he had more than the usual success. In Thomas' Fruit Culturist, just published, five varieties of the pear bear his name. Of the Convention which framed the first U. S. Pharmacopœa, in 1820, he was a member. When the Convention met again, in 1830, he was made the President. For the three years beginning in 1824, he was the Vice President of the Connecticut Medical Society. When the American Medical Association met in New Haven, in 1860, he was chosen its President. Though never a seeker of civil honors or titles, and nearly unacquainted with "that insidious animal vulgarly called a politician," through whose influence office is usually obtained, he was yet, by no fault of his, the Antimasonic candidate for Lieut. Governor of the State in 1831.

With whatever cause Dr. Ives connected himself, whether professional, scientific, or benevolent, his soul was in it. He was earnest, enthusiastic, but not unreasonable; zealous without bitterness; unused to cant; persistent, inflexible, though not perverse; and thoroughly conscientious. His temperament was of the sanguine or sanguineo-nervous sort, and his whole life was deeply tinged by the peculiarities of his organization.

It is to be regretted that our friend wrote and published so little. His Phi Beta Kappa oration, (on Botany and Chemistry,) a few medical cases, and the catalogues of plants, already referred to; five short papers (less than six pages in the whole) on botanical and agricultural subjects, in the first and third volumes of Silliman's *Journal of Science*; "Extracts from an Address before the New Haven Horticultural Society," in 1837, and "A Historical Sketch of the Medical Society of New Haven County," with very interesting biographical notices of Drs. Leverett Hubbard, Samuel Nesbitt, Ebenezer Beardsley, Eneas Monson, Sen., and Jared Potter, (the last of Wallingford, the others of New Haven,) published in January and February, 1848, in the "*Northern Literary Messenger*" of New Haven, and at a later period (October, 1852) in the *New Haven Journal and Courier*,—in the last instance the name of Levi Ives being added to the number of biographical notices,—are all which my inquiries have brought to light. They are sufficient, however, to show that our profession, to say nothing of science, has lost much—very much—by the too persistent reticence of one of its most distinguished cultivators. His numerous pupils and familiar associates have preserved a great deal which fell from his lips, or was disclosed in his practice; but a large amount of rare and valuable knowledge must have perished forever.

Dr. Ives died October 8th, 1861, having been connected with the Medical College forty-eight years. He occupied the chair of *Materia Medica* and Botany sixteen years, till 1829; that of Theory and Practice twenty-three years, till 1852; and that of *Materia Medica* again nine years, till his death, the last eight years as "*Professor Emeritus*."





